

STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

December 28, 1977

Professor Mark B. Adams
Department of History and
Sociology of Science
Edgar Fahs Smith Hall D6
215 South 34th Street
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104

Dear Professor Adams:

I had such warm recollections of Tamm that I really enjoyed going back to my old correspondence to see what I could find. Here are at least some fragments that corroborate what Crow told you. I certainly recall very distinctly my very firm impression that he regarded the whole Lysenko business as absolute nonsense, and that he was in company with a great many other physical and chemical scientists in that view, at least as of December 1958. I would be surprised if you did not by then find quite a substantial number of publications on the physical chemistry of DNA from the Soviet Union, regardless of what they may have been obliged to say even at that time about "Mendlism."

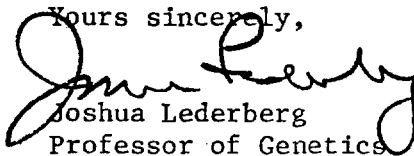
Tamm certainly did have a lively interest in biological matters. He asked me what I thought about the "abominable snowman," since he had the responsibility as a member of some committee of the science academy to decide on the funding of an expedition in the Caucasus to try to reach a conclusive finding on that question.

I also recall that while conversing at a reception at the Nobel Foundation, we used the term "nuclear" in a strictly biological context. An aggressive, Swedish newspaperperson was eavesdropping and, whether through a valid deficit in language or not, wanted to quote us as having been energetically discussing issues connected with thermonuclear weapons.

I had a faltering correspondence with Tamm at sporadic intervals over the years and was sorry to learn of his death not very long ago.

I certainly look forward to the appearance of your book.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL:ek-f
Enclosure

Attachment (P.S.)

Adams, M. B.

P.S.

Tamm's enlightened views were not generally shared by Timakov, Iemsolinskii, and Kossikov whom I met in 1957-58. But I felt they were less ideologically rigid than they were uninformed of new developments in microbiology. See, e.g. the Ciba Foundation Symposium on Drug Resistance in Micro-Organisms: Mechanisms of Development (London, J. & A. Churchill, Ltd., 1957); these Russians' views were not too different from Sevag's in the U.S. and Hinshelwood in the U.K.